



Make public the public space

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The city is our present, the place where we live, and for that reason we must promote the valorization of public spaces, and make them equal to monuments. The historical and artistic valorization of public spaces will contribute to an increased consciousness of our patrimony, will add to its conservation, and will further our identification with that same space. One should therefore develop the civic participation of the city's inhabitants by means of a process of historical knowledge, as a means for the appropriation of the public spaces.

This paper is focused on the idea that the historical knowledge is an important means for the people's appropriation of the public space and that exhibitions on and about public spaces, taking place in those very spaces, will further that appropriation and enable their understanding and reveal their meaning.

These exhibitions must create new forms of presenting and revealing public spaces in a new light, showing the projects and the construction of those spaces, going beyond their daily uses and meanings. The aim of these exhibitions is to make the public aware of those spaces' new dimensions, make them live and see public spaces as an aesthetic exercise, recovering the meaning of discovery of the city.

The setting up of exhibitions on architecture and urbanism, using as support the very architecture and urban spaces of those places, that is, the very city, will be the way to make effective the physical and artistic perception of the spaces concerned. In order to do that we propose a set of exhibitions to take place in Lisbon in urban areas of different historical periods and different meanings for the city: Praça do Comércio, Bairro de Alvalade and Bairro de Olivais-Sul.

Praça do Comércio

Praça do Comércio, ou Terreiro do Paço, was planned and built after the earthquake of Lisbon in 1755. Planned in 1756 by Eugénio dos Santos and Carlos Mardel, it took a few decades to complete. In 1775 was inaugurated the equestrian statue of the king D. José I, the focus of the square.

The square is an exceptional space regarding its origins, its dimension and its design. Since its inception the square has been a privileged location for the mis-en-scène of shows of power and of the image of power in a public space. Its unique character endows it with the nature, the quality and permanence of an art object.

The Praça do Comércio will be used as a pedagogic space and a space for the civic exercise of memory. The exhibition to take place there must recover its symbolic values and use both as stage and as scenario the space of this square that has been the mirror of successive ways of thinking and of feeling.

Exhibition:

Exhibition of large format photographs of historical images of Praça do Comércio, placed on the floor of the square. These will be juxtaposed on the traces left by the city's inhabitants in their daily percourses through the square.

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The people's trails, hurried and merely functional, on their way to and from work, will gain a new meaning, promoting their capacity of apprehension of the square, both spatially and symbolically, and thus relating interactively with both the space and different historical times.

The images will include ephemeral architectures put up for royal celebrations, constructions that disappeared with the earthquake of 1755, different projects for the reform of the city, panoramic views, unbuilt projects from different times.

Bairro de Alvalade

The Bairro de Alvalade is a neighbourhood of Lisbon designed by Faria da Costa in 1944, that in the 1950's would change the physiognomy of the city., introducing an image of modernity. With an area of 230 ha, for a population of 45.000 inhabitants, it was organized in eight neighbourhood units.

The new image of modernity of the neighbourhood had to do with the urbanization of old rural areas, the new proposals for social housing, the new architecture based on the principles of the modern movement, the construction of new services and equipments. An important characteristic of the Bairro de Alvalade is the smooth way it has evolved and been integrated within the fabric of the city. The exhibition will show this process and in doing so will promote a greater awareness of its inhabitants, enabling its preservation.

The exhibition will start from the beginning of things, that is, from the history of the site, its promotion and development, showing images of the pre-existences, the origin and the growth of the spaces, in order to make more effective the apprehension of the place.

Exhibition:

The exhibition will use as support the architecture itself – the blind façades of the buildings – to show the projects. That way a relationship of proximity will be established between the urban design and the urban spaces, between the architectural drawings and the architecture that was actually built. The same medium will be used to show projects for the same spaces, but which were not built.

Urban furniture – bus stops, public seats, tube stations – will also be used as supports for the exhibition. These elements are amongst the most active elements of interaction between the city's inhabitants and the public spaces.

A link must be established between the inhabitants and local institutions with strong roots in the neighbourhood – the City Council, the local boroughs, schools, the church – as well as with the university, located close by. This will be an opportunity to spur academic studies and researches on the subject, the writing of monographies, and the setting up of data bases.

Bairro de Olivais-Sul

The Bairro de Olivais-Sul was built from 1963, according to a plan designed by Rafael Botelho and Carlos Duarte in the late 1950's. With an area of 186 ha, structured in six neighbourhood units, it was planned for 38.250 inhabitants.

This neighbourhood was deliberately moulded on the principles of the Athens Charter, and became a laboratory for urban and architectural experimentation. New conceptions of public spaces and urban furniture were put forth, in which a group of artists have collaborated.

Sometimes, the architecture, urban furniture, even public art works were the victims of vandalism, seemingly provoked by the social alienation of their inhabitants. To counter this, we believe that a deeper understanding of the meaning and history of that space will enable its appropriation and upkeep by their inhabitants. Public spaces must be spaces of conviviality and knowledge may be used as a means of defence of the neighbourhood, preventing its becoming a space of conflict.

Exhibition:

The exhibition will be made up of a set of didactic games that will enable both children and adults to learn how their neighbourhood was born , thus developing a liking for the space where they live and learning how to look to that space in a different way.

The original planners will be invited to draw a plan of the neighbourhood in a local park, superimposed on the plan of the area before its actual construction. Children will put on dresses made out of plastic representing different buildings of the neighbourhood. The original architects will also be invited to design these costumes. Attired with these costumes representing different types of buildings and urban elements – residential buildings, schools, churches, trees, lamp posts, bus stops, and so on – the children will occupy their places in the plan of the neighbourhood, in their proper sequence.

These games must be carried out in close articulation with the neighbourhood schools and integrated in their curricula.

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